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# BULLETIN

OF

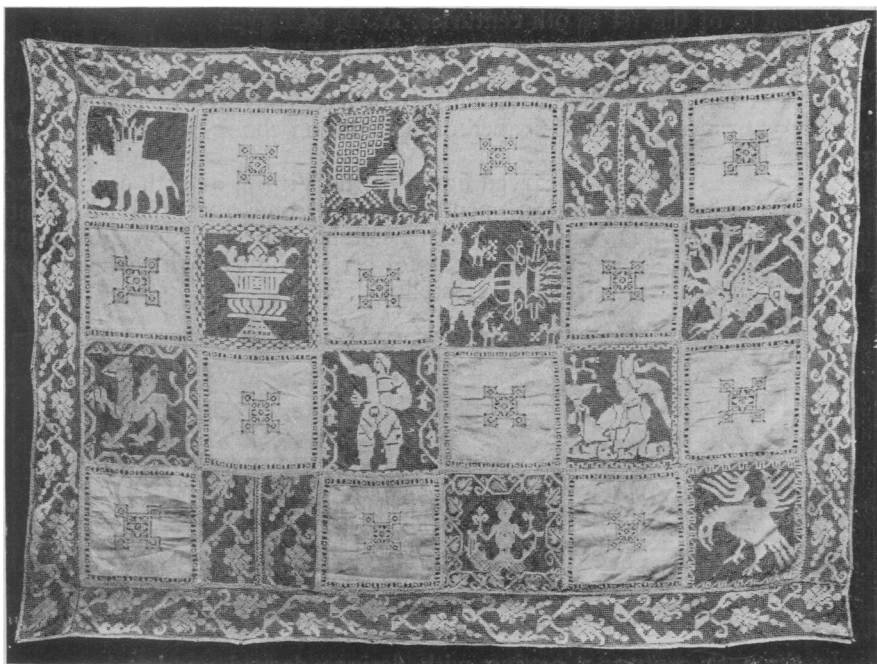
## THE PENNSYLVANIA MUSEUM

JANUARY 1, 1905

THIRD YEAR

NUMBER 9

### ANCIENT LACE (FIRST PAPER)



COVER

Illustrating "Punto à Maglia" or Darned Netting, Drawn Thread Work, "Punto Tagliato" or Cut Work, and Reticella

There are two distinct classes into which hand-made lace is divided—"Point" and "Pillow." The first is made by a needle, the latter on a pillow with bobbins, and the first thing to do in beginning the study of lace is to examine a sample of each kind with a magnifying glass. When it is seen that one piece is entirely composed of minute buttonholes, one then knows it to be Point

lace, but when the glass discloses the fact that the heavy part of the design resembles cambric, one recognizes that it is woven, that it is Pillow lace. We will first take up Point lace more in detail, although this little talk is merely the slightest sketch of a subject, on which many and most carefully written books have been given to the public.

### POINT LACE

is evolved from embroidery, the latter an art of which the origin is veritably lost in the mist of ages, an art evidently an old and well-known one about 1500 B. C., as we read in Exodus, 26th chapter, 36th verse, that the hangings for the door of the Tabernacle shall be "wrought with needlework," and in a subsequent chapter that for Aaron "thou shalt embroider a coat of fine linen." We recognize what is intended for embroidery on the robes of the Assyrian Kings, sculptured on the marbles in the British Museum, and we can see it in the specimens mingled with Tapestry found, and still being discovered, in the Coptic Tombs of the 1st to 9th centuries, A. D. in Egypt.

In looking at the 6th century mosaics at Ravenna, we notice the dentated borders on the rich costumes of the Empress Theodora and her ladies-in-waiting and we seem to hear the first faint whisper of lace, conveyed by that very word "dentated," from which tooth-shaped ornamentation comes, the French *dentelle* signifying lace.

One can see at Palma a carved figure of the Virgin, of 11th century work, whose robe is bordered with an open edge. On some 12th and 13th century sculpture, several similar instances occur, notably when in the latter century Nicolo Pisano ornamented the vestments of certain figures with what seems to be an open embroidery, strongly resembling lace.



ALTAR CLOTH

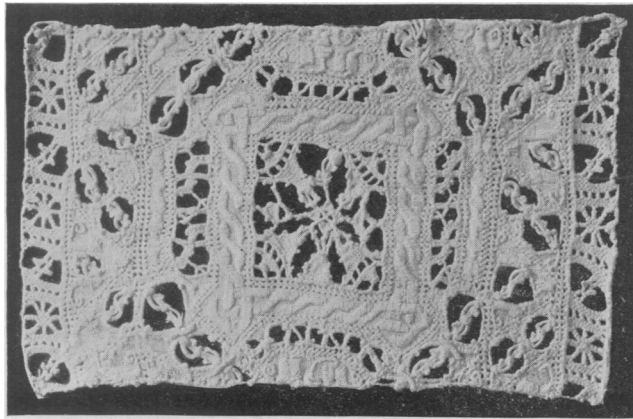
Illustrating "Punto à Maglia," or Darned Netting (Modern Filet Brodé). Subject, "Sacrifice of Isaac"

In the 14th century a netting with designs darned upon it began to be much used for altar cloths, hangings, covers, etc., and was made not only in Italy, but in France and other European countries. In Italy it was called "Punto à Maglia," in France "Lacis" and in England "Darned Netting." Later designs were made especially for it in the pattern books of the 16th century by Paganmino, Taglienti, F. Vinciolo, C. Vicellio, etc. These books in the original are very rare, and our Museum is fortunate in possessing one by Cesare Vicellio, published in Venice in 1591. At this present time, four centuries later, the latest fashion among lovers of, and workers in, needlework,

is this very Punto à Maglia, popularly known now as "Filet Brodé," and the designs of even the Gothic monsters, strange figures, etc., one still sees employed among those of a late period. In the Lace Department of our Museum we have several excellent examples, one of which, the "Sacrifice of Isaac," being extremely quaint and interesting.

The "Punto Tirato" or Drawn Thread Work of the 15th century is another step towards giving a light and airy effect to embroidery with which it began to mingle at this time. It was, as it still is, simply a withdrawal of threads regulating the design, the threads left in the linen being caught together with fine stitches and the portion of linen remaining treated in the same way.

At this time also we find "Punto Tagliato" (from which we derive our word tailor), or Cut Work, introduced into the embroidery, first in simple designs made by punching or cutting holes with a stiletto in the linen, overcasting them afterwards, and later when the holes became much larger (being cut in circles and squares) filled in with geometric designs, partly made by the Genoese stitch and partly by threads covered by the buttonhole stitch. This

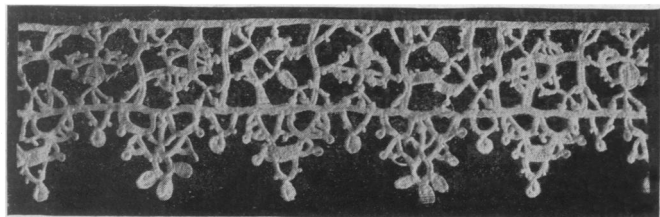


EMBROIDERY

With "Punto Tagliato," or Cut Work. Fifteenth Century

soon developed into "Reticella," which had all the *appearance* of lace, as it was no longer an accompaniment of embroidery. That it was not actually so was due to the fact that part of it was made from a foundation of linen cut into thin rectilinear lines following generally the warp and woof of same, and having these lines thoroughly overcast by the buttonhole stitch. The spaces, however, between were filled in with geometric designs (or radiating lines making circles and squares) done in buttonhole stitch called "Punto in Aria" or "Point in the Air," and this is the first actual Point lace. Before describing the process of making this lace, I desire to call your attention to the illustration at the head of this article, in which you will find four of the varieties of needlework I have endeavored to describe, from embroidery to "Punto in Aria." As you will see,

one alternate set of squares is composed of "Punto à Maglia" or Darned Netting, the other of linen bordered by Drawn Thread Work; and in the centre of each linen square one recognizes both the "Punto Tagliato" or Cut Work and the "Reticella."



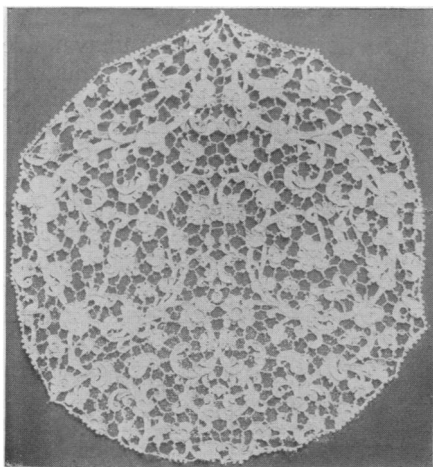
RETICELLA

Partly made from a Linen Foundation, Partly by Buttonhole Stitch

We have now by successive stages from heavy embroidery arrived at the open Point lace, first called "Punto in Aria" or "Point in the Air," and so called because it was not made upon a linen foundation but upon thin outlines of thread, as a spider weaves its web from one side to the other. The process was simple, and as follows: The design was made on a piece of parchment, preferable to paper on account of superior strength; a thread was laid following the design, and fastened down at intervals by a separate thread and needle to the parchment. The outlines were then covered with buttonhole stitch, and as the designs at this time (late 16th century) were all geometric, the lace was much easier of execution, the lines and circles were thickly covered with buttonhole stitches and a strongly marked figure was the result, simple as it might be. Later in the 17th century, when beautiful and complicated designs arose of scrolls, leaves, flowers, etc., the work became, of course, more difficult and slower in execution; also many varieties of stitches were introduced into the centre of the blossoms, leaves, etc., although always done in buttonhole stitch. Also at this time a variety of names were given to the lace according to the manner of its execution. "Flat" or "Ivory," "Rose," and the very elaborate and very much raised Point, "Punto Tagliato à Foliami," are familiar names to us, although all were known under the general name of Venetian Lace.

In the latter part of the 17th century, when the lighter Pillow laces of Belgium became very fashionable, Venice endeavored to regain some of her diminished trade by making a most exquisite and marvelously fine needle-point lace with a background of net called "Point de Venise a Reseau." This is with difficulty recognized sometimes from Pillow lace, and in the study of this lace the magnifying glass would certainly have to be employed to be able to see the buttonhole stitch, which constitutes Point lace. But soon after this, the last effort of Venice for a long time, to regain the lost supremacy of an art for which she was famous, lacemaking languished and died, and it is within a comparatively short time that it has been revived; but it is a flourishing industry now and an important factor for good in employing thousands of women and young girls, not only in and near Venice, but on the estates of many who are heart and soul interested in the welfare of Italy.

In the 17th century, about 1665, Colbert, alarmed at the enormous amount of money expended by France for Venetian Point lace, determined that he would leave no stone unturned to introduce the art of making that lace in France. To that end and not without much trouble and expense he secured Venetian lace-makers and established them at a number of small towns in France, notably Alençon and Argentan. The lace naturally at first was very similar both in make and design to that of Venice, was very beautiful, proved a great success at court, and was christened "Point de France." Soon, however, one change succeeded another in the designs, until finally the background became a fine net, the flowers, leaves, etc., became smaller, and the lace assumed the character of the "Alençon" and "Argentan" we know to-day, although, of course, the designs have changed with progress of time. Belgium at this time was also making, at Brussels, a Point lace very similar to that of "Alençon," and the difference is difficult to distinguish. Frequently one must make use of the magnifying glass to observe whether the cordonnet (the tiny cord that outlines every flower, every leaf, etc., of the design) is covered with the buttonhole stitch, as in the "Alençon" lace, or whether it is simply overcast, as in the "Brussels."



VENETIAN POINT  
Seventeenth Century

There was a small amount of Point lace made in Spain in the convents in the 17th century, generally in the style of the "Punto Tagliato à Foliami," rich and heavy in design and in execution. Some authorities claim that the lace was all made in Italy, but bought so extensively by Spain that, like the blonde laces of France, it was named "Spanish," in compliment to the great appreciation in which the lace was held by Spain.

EMILY LELAND HARRISON.

(To be concluded.)

